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UNDERNEATH A BOUGH

BY

CHRISTINE HOPE BANBURY

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TO MY FATHER: THE PERFECT KNIGHT

CONTENTS

	Page
The Perfect Knight	11
St. Ives by the Sea	12
The City of Dreams	14
The Mother	16
My Poplars	17
Gleaning Time	18
Heather Bells	20
To My New Friend	22
I Thank God	24
By the Sea	25
After Many Days	26
Eager Eyes	28
Surrender	29
In Starlight	30
The Realms of Gold	31
To the First Violet	33
The Week-Ender	34
Rainbow May	35
Haunted	36
Two Roads	37
Sing to Youth	39
The End of the Day	40
My Faith	41
The Water Wagtail's Pool	42
Rose Leaves	44
My Lad	45
Dedication	46
The Seekers	47
Sleeping	48
Scent of Camomile	49
The Cromlech	50
The Over-Soul	51
The Wanderer	52

CONTENTS

	Page
Thor	53
Farewell	54
De Profundis	55
Renunciation	57
Too Late	58
The Hilltop	60
The Reformer	61
Come Not So Near	62
Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of	63
Daisy Chains	64
In the Valley	65
Song	66
Veils of Sense	67
The Enchaining	68
If I Were a Circus-Dancer	70
A March Violet	71
Love Song	72
For Me	73
The Song Eternal	74
At Her Grave	77
The Last Vigil	79
"Nor All Thy Tears Wash Out a Word of It"	81
Norwegian Woman's Song	83
Among the Hills	85
A Window in February	87
The Legend of the Sea Gull	94
The Legend of Queen Gudrun	102

THE PERFECT KNIGHT

A town there is, a busy troubled town,
With dim and dusty streets and narrow ways.
Sordid its passions, sad its Summer days,
And years pass over it without renown.

A life there is, a silent strenuous life,
Pent in those streets, exiled from joy awhile,—
The life of one whom pain hath taught to smile,
A man made God-like, lifted from its strife.

And, for that he hath sometimes walked therein,
The streets are blazoned fair and decked in gold
And clean hands high above the turmoil hold
A knightlier shield than ever knight could win.

ST. IVES BY THE SEA

O little town a-glimmer in the dark,
  Looking with half-shut eyes across the bay,
Dim are the seas where shifting shadows mark
  Perils beyond the grey.
The deep night shrouds the grace
You hide within the purple robe folded about your face.
  O little shadowy town!

O little town all blinding in the sun
  Within a close-drawn veil of misty light,
The silver sea birds, gathering one by one,
  Soar to your white walls' height.
White tier on tier they rise
From ocean's glittering blue to where the clouds melt in the skies.
  O little magic town!

O little town, rain-filled and wan and cold,
  Drenched in the salt sea spray and earth's wet tears,
Still secret is the secret that you hold
  Untold through all the years,
Wrapt in a pale sea mist,
Full of strange forms and changing shapes of grey and amethyst.
  O little foam-ringed town!

O little town, where wailing sea mews call,
  There is one heart that knows your mystery.
Where a small window set in a high wall
  Opens upon the sea,

She of your soul hath sight
Through all your glowing days, your mists, your softly curtained night.
O little perilous town!

O little town, a jewel in the skies,
Circled by wide-winged birds, all silver white,
How all the piercing clamour of their cries—
The cries, the air, the light—
A curtain rend apart,
And all the sweetness pierces through to break one woman's heart.
O little human town!

THE CITY OF DREAMS

The flood runs clear, the flood runs brown—
City of fabled fair renown,
Would that thy tide might bear us down
To Camelot, to Camelot!

The flood runs swift, the flood runs slow—
Give me the secrets thou dost know.
Give me the blossoms red that blow
In Camelot, in Camelot.

The pale stream sighs and sighing sings.
Give me the bird with wide grey wings
That tireless up the tideway swings
To Camelot, to Camelot.

Give me the glitter and bold array
Of gold cuirass and favour gay,
The spear point's gleam along the way
To Camelot, to Camelot.

O fair dream river, swift and fair!
O flood that bears the dreamer where
The grey-walled castle towers there
In Camelot, in Camelot,—

Never a stream flows on so fast
By snow-white sail and rocking mast,
Never a city looms so vast
As Camelot, as Camelot.

Never the spears' old clash and gleam
Return from out the glittering dream.
Never the azure pennons stream
In Camelot, in Camelot.

Never the grey bird spreads her wings.
No more the blood-red blossomings
Of tangled brier hang o'er the springs
In Camelot, in Camelot.

No more the singing stream shall fall
Past the square tower and builded wall.
O nevermore the sad sea call
By Camelot, by Camelot!

THE MOTHER

Life was a tender dream in the sun
  And a wonder beneath its rain.
I laughed, I laughed for the joy of it,
  I laughed, I laughed at the pain.

Why am I craven for your sake,
  Child of a younger day?
Smile if you can, and your courage take,
  And strength, and strength in your two
    small hands,
And cry to God for His grace.
  If I cannot smile, I can turn away
My head and you shall not see my face.

Your youth is blossoming in the sun
  And springing beneath the rain,
But I weep, I weep for the joy of it,
  I weep, I weep for the pain.

MY POPLARS

Will you love me, O trees, will you love me?
Do you know me for lover and kin,—
A feeble earth creature whose life is a day?
Will you bend down to bless me and hear when
I pray?
For ye are my kin far above me
And I far below you am kin.

Will you tell me, O trees, will you tell me
Of the walking of God in your midst?
The secrets you learn of the infinite sky,
The sob of the winds as they see the day die,
The songs of the stars will you spell me
When God is abroad in their midst?

Will you keep me, O trees, will you keep me
And call me your own to the end?
In your myriad arms all enfolded and blest,
And lulled in your rhythmical crooning to rest,
In your heaven-drawn life will you steep me
That I may have peace at the end.

GLEANING TIME

In Summer we go gleaning
  By field and upland sheer,
And bring back store of the harvest
  To be our Winter cheer.

The long pale grass of August
  Still sings through our thought at night,
And all the barren moorland
  Is still with the gorse alight.

The ocean holds his jewels
  Unmatched in any town—
Topaz and pearl and emerald,
  A-gleam the deep seas down.

Forever and forever
  The smooth white sands will shine;
For aye across the heather
  The rich winds float like wine.

Where broods the misty azure
  Above the lichened tor
The warm brown earth her carpet
  Spreads out for heaven's floor.

'Tis well that the fields are golden,
  'Tis well that the sky is blue
For we must glean of their glory
  To light us the Winter through.

We are reckless of time and season,
Too glad in the sun to care,
And remember like Eve our Eden
When all the weald is bare.

And Summer's the time for bringing
Our sheaves for the whole bleak year,
To gather store of the harvest
To make our Winter cheer.

HEATHER BELLS

The heather bells are ringing wistful music to the skies,—
Don't you hear them ring your bridal, smiling mouth and
suffering eyes?
The strange sad sea is calling—don't you hear it?—lying
still,
The plaything of the ruthless gods who maimed but dared
not kill.

Oh, the treasure of our winning was Love's too-godlike
crown,
And the old gods saw with envy, and for envy struck you
down.
And they looked to see you cower, but you faced them
with disdain,
While you held your head the prouder, smiled more stead-
fast through the pain.

And men go on unwitting while you hear their passing
feet
Lying sheltered in a gloaming from the fever and the
heat.
Mayhap you weep in secret, thinking on your prowess
fled,
But not even the gods shall know a change or see you drop
your head.

Do you weary for the open, for the bracken on the down?
Do you fret to join the clamour in the battlefield of
Town?—

To follow where the highway winds, a belt of dusty white,
To know again the lust for gold, the fierceness of the fight?
Your battlefield is in that soul, unconquerably your own,
Where, uplifted from all earthly things, you fight and stand alone,
And, hidden from our knowing, there the lofty pride renew
That touches still the mouth to smiles the gods could not subdue.

TO MY NEW FRIEND

At our first meeting, dear, I knew you not.
And at the second some dim influence came
That stirred me with the music of your name.
The third its full sweet revelation brought.

I all that night lay wakeful for your sake,
And all that night lay thinking on your face
Till sleep crept in at dawn a little space
And brought an unreal sorrow in its wake. . .

Helpless I lay and swift my terror grew
With deep sobs in the dark, till, as I wept
Into my dreaming a new comfort crept,—
With senses blurred by sleep I looked on you.

You came to me and angel-like your tread,
And deep your eyes of sorrow and of truth,
I felt your hand touch mine in tender ruth,
And found your shoulder pillowing my head. . .

Not thus, O new-found comrade, would I take
My place beside you—no new burden add.
My love I humbly bring to make you glad.
I would be strong and steadfast for your sake.

Take, if you will, all that I have to give,
Though it be little worth my offering.
Beyond all words more precious gifts you bring
And always you will give and I receive.

You bring me knowledge of a greater good.
I feel your soul search mine with an intense
Thrill of the pulses, and the illumined sense
Holds consciousness of things not understood.

I have seen earth new-made, and with your eyes
Look out into an infinite wonder-world,
And find life's strange sweet secrets all unfurled,
Touched by all passions and all harmonies.

I THANK GOD

I thank God that we met,
That in the careless street,
Where up and down men go with blundering feet,
We did not lose each other in the press,
We did not greet and pass and then forget.

I thank Him for that impulse when we met
Which to our sense a mutual message brought
Of something kin, some fusion of our thought,
That seeing one another we could pass
Unheeding or uncaring nevermore.
I thank God that you knew me when we met.

BY THE SEA

A slope of grass to the sea,
  The rock of the drowsing waves,—
Could all their crooning bring back to me
  The peace that my wild heart craves.

O warmth of the summer sky!
  O bed of the brown sea weed!
I seek from you, e'er the hour goes by,
  Your rest for my body's need.

The depth of a quiet sea,
  The clasp of the kindly waves.
This is your last best gift to me,
  The sleep that the whole of me craves.

AFTER MANY DAYS

Not of my Summer hours,
  Ye, O my songs, were born.
I had all but lost my dreams,
  All but my hope forsworn,
All but forgot the days of light and
    the angel that brought the flowers.

Ye were given to stay my tears,
  O my children of loss and pain,
And were their falling more bitter yet
  I cherish it all as gain,
For you, God-given, my darling ones,
    offspring of my darkened years.

Ye are not of my race and name,
  And no creator am I.
Swift-footed ye came to earth
  Full-grown, from a radiant sky.
But humbly I call you children because
    through my tears ye came.

Not of my morning dreams,
  Thou, O my faith, hast grown,—
Sprung and blossomed and risen high,
  Face to the stars, alone.
But out of the horror and clouds of night
    the flower of thy beauty gleams.

Not of Thy joy, Most Sweet,
Dear Friend of the labouring earth
But out of Thy breaking heart
The hope of the world had birth,
And the children of men tread joyfully
because of Thy wounded feet.

Nor out of the peaceful years,
O saint of the Sacred Palm,
Grew the white soul of Thee, heaven-high,
Holy and fair and calm,
But in the fierce hour of Thy martyrdom
and the travail too deep for tears.

And so of the sorest pain,
The longings and love unblest,
Out of the anguish of prayers denied
Shall come in the hour of rest
Our beautiful children of broken dreams,
when the hope of the heart is vain.

EAGER EYES

Close thine eyes, little sister. Night cometh and night is good.
It hideth the great world from thee, too strange to be understood.

Close thine eyes, little sister. Think not of the weary day.
It is still too soon for thy labour and thou has forgotten thy play.

Close thine eyes for a little nor open the secret door.
Having fed on that terrible beauty thy heart shall forget no more.

SURRENDER

O mine angel
That walkest by my side, soul with my soul,
In all thy holy patience, have thy way!
To-day I have grown nearer thee,—to-day
New meanings through the spirit barrier stole.

O mine angel,
Hast thou through years of unregarded care,
Unblessed, unheeded, watched my stumbling feet—
Thou, the sole pulse of life, when life was sweet—
And shall I not to thee turn all my prayer?

O mine angel!
Believe that true and faithful I would be
When on the morrow I shall pass thee by.
E'en when I shall forget, blaspheme, deny,
Still in the heart's depths I belong to thee.

O mine angel,
Condemn me not when I shall turn aside
And listen to an evil voice, not thine,
And bow my head before an alien shrine,
Before false gods, who falsely stir my pride.

O mine angel
Condemn me not! The hidden life I live
Is wholly thine whom wholly I adore.
More than my love thou claim'st, and shalt have more—
More than my own soul had I more to give.

IN STARLIGHT

O green little leaves, have pity!
O little brown twigs, lean low, lean low,
Bend down to the grass, to the grass below,
Look down on the face below!

Little green leaves, oh, listen!
Hear ye no sound in the sky, no sound?
No word from the trees, from the trees around,
No voice in the woods around?

Tell me, green leaves, oh, tell me!
For strange are the words, are the words you sing
All under the stars in your whispering,—
In fear are ye whispering!

O little green leaves, I fear me!
For dim are the woods and the sky is dim,
And cold are the heart and the lips of him,
Clay-cold are the lips of him.

Alas! O leaves of the forest,
I know by my heart that it sorrows so
'Tis my own heart's lord who is stricken low,
My lord who is lying low.

O pitiful leaves, fall faster!
Fall down and cover him from the skies;
I dare not look at his eyes, his eyes,
Ah, cover his hungry eyes!

THE REALMS OF GOLD

I choose from the gifts of God.
  My choosing is frank and free.
And so that I keep my own
  What matters the world to me?

A realm there is and a crown
  That only myself may win.
My wealth I hide in my heart
  And none may intrude therein.

You fight for glory and gold
  And sneer at my humble dower.
I smile as the fight goes on,
  And ye may keep your power.

Give me the throbbing dusk,
  And then in a purple night
Star-jewels behind the clouds
  And dawn that is keen and white.

The scents and songs of the field
  Sun-kissed, and over the hills
The far-off surges of sound
  Where the old sea its end fulfills.

The hand of a friend to hold,
  The lips of a child to press,
My books, and the world may keep
  What the world calls happiness.

God offers his gifts to man,
And the greatest he gives to me
Is the right to refuse or to take,—
In my soul to be blessedly free.

TO THE FIRST VIOLET

Wake not the heart long drugged to all desire!
Ye birds, who sing of hope sing not to me.
Ye violets, whose breath is ecstasy,
Kindle for me no more life's futile fire.

I have a dream that must not dare to live.
I have a dream and to awake is death.
Shutter the casement, curtain out the breath
Of the false Spring who has no hope to give.

Wake not desire in me—wake not the pain
That I have fought so long to hold at bay.
Let me forget!—Ah, God, keep Spring away—
Stir not my pulses into life again!

THE WEEK-ENDER

Through six mad days of the hustling week
I toil for pay
But my rest I seek
A thousand miles from the world away.

The open road and the open sky
And alone awhile!
No passer-by
With tiresome well-meant word and smile.

The top of the highest hill in sight—
That is my goal
And oh, delight!
My shattered spirit again grows whole.

Winds of the world and light and peace,—
No balm like this.
The heart's release,
The earth's embrace and the sun's warm kiss.

From babble of tongues and a city's strife
Perplexed and driven
I choose my life.—
To be alone is to dwell near heaven!

RAINBOW MAY

Grey-green on the orchard bough,
  And rosy the buds between.
The pallid blue of a misty morn,—
  Ah, joy too keen, too keen!

A thousand flags in the mere,
  Gold stars in a rippling sky.
The sense set swimming in opal light,—
  A world to Heaven made nigh.

The amethyst dawn of night,
  The glowing crown of the day—
O apple boughs and a yellow moon,—
  The prism of rainbow May!

HAUNTED

We sat where cliffs rise steeply, safe-shadowed from the heat
Through all the Summer afternoon, my well-beloved and I.
We watched the mists grow golden where earth and heaven meet,
We saw a strange sail dipping, we heard a strange bird cry.

The crested waves foamed up and died in ripples on the shore.
We watched them purpling, idly, till the red sun went down;
The torn dark sail was gone, the sea birds' cry we heard no more.
We turned with laugh and happy jest towards the brightening town.

* * * * * *

The night tide to the lonely beach bore up a burden dread—
So young they died, so near the shore!—but this the bitterest dole—
A coat lashed to a broken oar, the signal of the dead,
The last hope of the hopeless four whose death is on my soul.

For all my nights are haunted by a boy's eyes wild with fear,
And all my days pass darkly as that day comes to me—
The cries of men in agony we were too dull to hear,
The signal of despairing hearts we were too blind to see.

TWO ROADS

I

There is a pathway to the setting sun,
  Through untrod lands all luminous and bright,
  Peopled with antique memories, strangely dight.
A perilous path, from too-sweet fancy spun,
  Wherein all journeying seems a new delight.

And fairy castles float there, turreted
  In gold, with crimson pennants streaming wide.
  And casements swing to let a white hand slide
Along the sill. And birds of flaming red
  Through moving webs of tangled branches glide.

Therein sits one in glory on a throne,
  Lure of remembered years and unlived hours,
  All wreathed about with chains of scentless flowers
And there fair forms, by milk-warm breezes blown,
  Float, beckoning with pale hands to quests unknown.

Follow them not, for as the transient fire
  Faints in the sky, they also melt and change
  And in the dimness fade to symbols strange,
Intangibly grey and silent, a dumb choir,
  Sped hopes, lost dreams, the phantoms of desire.

II

There is no pathway to the trackless East.
  Frozen and vast, it lies as though asleep,
  And silent on its breast dim shadows keep
A fearful vigil, as a dark-robed priest
  Watches the dying, while the long hours creep.

No craven heart may dare it where it lies
Untenanted by e'en the ghosts of life,
Its boundaries hidden past our knowing, rife
With crowded perils; where unhewn forests rise
And uncrossed desert wastes affright the eyes.

Adventure it for all that lies at stake!
Back to the Past and face to the To-Come
Hew out a track and through the void and dumb
Spaces of nothingness, as the nations wake,
Lo, on your labour shall the sure dawn break.

Morn shall a new day to a new world bring.
The spreading grey shall grow to amethyst,
And melt in crimson light, and the blind mist
Dissipate in the swift sun's upward swing,—
Full day and glorious crown you for its king!

SING TO YOUTH

Youth, and the glory of youth!
The leaf, and the bud, and the flower,
The flame and the fire of the Spring,
That flashes and dies in an hour.
The rapture of linnets that sing;
The jewels, blood-red, of thy dower,
O Youth, and the glory of youth!

Youth, and the passion of youth!
The grasp, and the greed, and the gain,
The glow of the heart and the fire,
The promise and crown to attain;
The far-reaching hands that aspire,
The clamour, and yearning, and pain,—
The grasp and ambition of youth.

Youth, and the briefness of youth!
The glow that is gone in an hour,
The life of a gnat in the sun,
The death of the fruit and the flower;
The quest that is lost as it's won,
The dream of the passion of power—
The swift wistful passing of youth!

THE END OF THE DAY

What of thy hot desires, O heart?
  What of the race to run for fame?
Clash of armies and clang of mart,
  Fevered hope of a high acclaim?

Let it go with the dust it raises!
  Let it go! Let us seek release
From men's quick blame, and the world's brief praises—
  Turn we homeward to nature's peace.

Shade among trees and a green world spread over us,
  We who have toiled in the dust of the day,—
Sleep among trees and the white mist to cover us
  Cover in quiet the worn of the fray.

MY FAITH

I should not think it strange
If Fortune's wheel,
By some quick-moving change,
Should set me on the pinnacle of fame
And give me a revered and honored name.
Nor should I feel
Greatly amazed if time should to me bring
Power and lands and lavish gold to fling.
I should not think it strange.

Nor should I deem it strange
If this same wheel
With ever-moving change
Should sink me into sin and woe and shame,
Debase me into depths I dare not name.
I should not feel
Wonder at any guilt revealed within.
Am I not to all human weakness kin?
I should not think it strange.

But it would be most strange,
Dearest, if you
Should ever know a change.
Whether I meet with Fortune's smile or frown,
Whether the wheel of Life go up or down,
O Loved and True!
Whatever fate befall, where e'er I be
If you should ever lose your love for me
'Twould be most strange, most strange!

THE WATER WAGTAIL'S POOL

Down they come, the merry wagtails,
  Dip the breast and preen the wing,—
Plumage in a pretty flutter,
Twittering, calling, mad with Spring.

There the iris buds are breaking
  And the grass is deep and cool.
There I found her, there I wooed her,
  By the water wagtail's pool.

Mating-time among the alders
  Growing-time for rush and reed,
Time of blossom on the blackthorn
  Time of fragrance on the mead.

And I tarried for my mating
  Where the swallows wheel and dart.
Trembling to the arms that craved her
  Came the woman of my heart.

Came a Summer hot and cruel,
  Drank the water from the spring,
Scorched the fields and dried the river,
  Killed the flowers, blossoming.

Came a tempest, passion-laden,
  Blowing from the gates of shame,
And the mouth of hell was opened
  And my soul scorched in the flame.

Then the long fierce drought of August
Drove the wagtails farther west.
And the jealous flame that caught me
Seared the pity in my breast.

And the swallows dipped no longer
To their shadows in the pool,
Where I cursed her for a wanton,
And I cursed myself as fool.

And my heart broke in its anguish
And the heavens turned to brass.
There I killed her, there I left her,
Dead, and lying in the grass.

Lips of velvet that the sun
  Never quits from hour to hour,
Crimson petals every one
  Of the world's great wonder-flower.

Bring your trembling curves to me
  When the evening light is done,
When on meadow and on lea
  Fairy gossamer is spun.

When the bats come silently
  And the glowworm's lamp is bright,
Bring those laughing lips to me,
  I will kiss their crimson white.

Holy in the hush of night
  When all elves and fays have power,
Glow the petals, red and white,
  Of the world's great wonder-flower.

MY LAD

Night, and the wind sweeps through
the trees.
It minds me o' the day
A fair-haired laddie angered me
An' I sent my lad away.

I sent him out wi' bitter words
Into the storm an' rain.
He went wi' sorrow in his eyes,—
He did not come again.

* * * * *

An' every night I see his ship
A-tossing on the sea,
An' every night I hear his voice,
But he does not call to me.

Night, an' the wind sweeps through
the trees
An' fierce drops lash the pane.
Night, an' a fair-haired laddie walks
Down the hill-road, in the rain.

DEDICATION

It is enough that you should read these words
  And find in them a sweetness all your own,—
Through their faint music listening for your name,
  Hearing *"I love you"* in the undertone.

It is enough, you dear lost unseen friend,
  That we should see Love as he stands to-day,—
This Love, our brave young god with hallowed eyes.
  Perchance his hour is not so far away.

It is enough you bend your head to hear
  The crying of a voice through the chill air,
To catch the notes of an old lute once sweet,
  And put out hands to touch my human hair.

E'en when in my impatience I am wild
  For keener vision of your new world's worth
It is enough, dear. If you are in heaven
  I know that you are very near to earth.

THE SEEKERS

Daily they bend the knee before a shrine,
  Daily they ask the leading of a hand,
The guiding of a voice that is divine.

Daily they turn and go into the street
  With man's small measure limiting their thought,
With man's blind laws embarrassing their feet.

Daily they deem their ceaseless prayer unheard,
  Nor heed the message whispered in the heart,
Nor know the meaning of the answering word.

SLEEPING

Deep in ice-bound furrows,
  Hid in marsh and mere
Safe from the storms and fury
  Of the bitter night of the year,
Shelter the shy field-dwellers,
  Wee lives that we hold so dear.

Closed up in bare elm branches,
  Hiding in forests old,
Sleeping away the Winter
  Far under the frozen mould,
Thousands of tiny blossoms
  Lie hidden from the cold.

Not dead but waiting, waiting,
  Turned upward to the light,
Looking for Spring's sweet coming,
  Listening through the night
For the murmur afar of the voices
  Of rivulets out of sight.

SCENT OF CAMOMILE

Once by the laughing Western shore
When white moon daisies grew,
Where floods of blissful sunlight pour
Their gold upon the blue,
And heather spreads a purple floor,
A happy child laughed too.

Ah, long ago! For she is old
And like a songbird penned
And fluttering in the city's hold
Until the tune shall end.
'Tis not the city mart's soiled gold
To her can comfort lend.

But day by day to the grim street
There shines the Summer smile;
She sees the bracken at her feet,
She hears a song the while,—
And then it comes, the faint, the sweet,
Wild scent of Camomile.

Among the ancient mounds that keep
  The dead who once were British kings
  I muse upon the power that brings
All the old warrior chiefs to sleep
On this wild hillside by the sea,—
  A race too fierce for love or grief,
  Long dead with its remote belief,
Its barbarous divinity.
Are we indeed more wise than they,
  We who all forms of faith deny
    We who make merry on their tombs?
A trivial life is ours to-day.
  Behind us what brave records lie?
    Before us what chaos looms?

I am kin to the birds, though my life is a stranger to song,
And dumb are the lips that would sing.
I am part of their ecstasy, heir to the dreams that belong
To Dawn, and the music they bring.—
I am kin to the birds though no voice in me wakens to song.

I am kin to the poets, for chords of their music and pain
Are throbbing for aye in my breast.
I long with their longing, though voiceless the passion and vain,
Eternal the dream and the quest.—
I am kin to the poets, made nigh by the kinship of pain.

I am kin to the angels, though sinning and sorrow are mine,
And my life as the life of a beast,
For the pity and purity theirs are of essence divine,
And I may approach to that feast.—
I am kin to the angels whose purity yet may be mine.

THE WANDERER

Oh, glad of heart is the wayfarer,
And strong the hopes in his breast that stir
When bright are the lights of home.

Though far and weary the toilsome way,
There's welcome here at the end of day
And the weariest road leads home.

* * * *

But what of the pilgrim frail of limb?
And what of the road that waits for him,
The way to that distant home?

His faint eyes lose the far-off light,
His feet forsake the celestial height,
And yet do his eyes turn home!

THOR

When earth was young the gods held rule by awe.
  Watching from Asgard, dread and dark with ire,
  Thor flashed his lightnings and bestowed his fire,
Drew down his brows and thundered forth his law.
Not with hushed breath we speak of him to-day.
  The memory of a legend cannot move
  Our spirits dull as earth. The world will prove
His thunder is a power passed away.

But souls in eager silent greeting rise
  When a strong man with dominating sway
    Leads to new power and life,—when as of yore,
Thor's lightning wakens in his flashing eyes,
  Mastery and might are his and we obey,
    Love, reverence, worship for the sake of Thor.

FAREWELL

My way lies into strange new lands—
  So strange the path and ah, how cold.
  I leave behind the two who hold
My life in their unheeding hands.

I leave one waiting for release—
  So sad his heart, and ah, so cold,
  And lonely yet as we grow old.—
Ah, wounded heart, were I your peace!

I leave one sleeping by the sea—
  Long dead she is and passing cold—
  And oh, that she would loose her hold
On this one heart so dear to me.

My future lies in many lands,
  And if the way be rough and cold
  I look towards the western gold
And bear my fate in willing hands.

DE PROFUNDIS

My feet were fast in the mire,
  And I said, "I have failed again!
I am no more fit to stand
  In the midst of honest men.
Let me go to my base desire!"

But the dear Christ smiled and said,
  "If a brother's hand can guide,
Can help you over the dusty way,
  Be true to its friend where the worst betide,
Hold mine and be better sped."

And I said, "I have fallen low,
  My life is the scorn of men.
If you set my feet on the upland road
  Will they hold their way therein?
What hope when they stumble so?"

But He knew, ah, He knew the way,
  'Twas the road He had taken too.
"Without the failing, without the shame,
  There was never a soul to its stature grew,
Nor a saint to His heaven came.

"There are endless ages to run.
  Begin it over a-new,
And if you falter a thousand times,
  Once, at the end, you'll be true,
And one step of the way be won.

"And because of your scarlet sin
If men should their love refuse,
Rejected, oh, turn to Me.
I will not count the years you lose,
But only the fight you win."

RENUNCIATION

You, whom life on its wheel hath broken,
  Seek where a hidden treasure lies.
In golden visions and dreams unspoken
  Meet God in His kingdom, angel-wise.

Turn from the world's vain way of loving,
  Seeking higher, though loss betide.
Face the stars in your sorrow, proving
  The love that comes of a love denied.

Turn from gain to a realm of losses—
  All may go so the best remain.
Only light are the lifted crosses,
  Only golden the crown of pain.

Turn from love and you cannot lose it.
  Turn from joy and it springs within.
The deep unseen of the heart, oh, choose it!
  In silence faring the gift to win.

Turn to the hills, let the clouds come o'er you.
  All your hope and your treasure give.
Darkness and barren lands before you—
  But turn and know that your soul shall live.

TOO LATE

What do you ask of me, you
I smiled at in years gone by,
Smiled when my heart was sore?
Here in the selfsame place,
Under the same blue sky
We parted as friends, no more.

Now in a dream, I can hear
The wash of the outgoing tide,
The pebbles' crash on the beach.
I see, as we saw it then,
A sky serene and wide,
Blue to its farthest reach.

Now, as of old, are the cries
Of sea gulls borne on the wind.
Now, in a hazy noon
Sails drift out of the bay.—
Oh, but your eyes were blind,
Your eyes were blind that day!

I wept by the sea that day
Where the swift green waters swirled
As I shall not weep again.
Oh, but your eyes were blind!
If you had called me then
I had followed you over the world.

What can you ask of me, you
Who jested in years gone by,
Laughed when my heart was sore?
Here in the same sweet place,
Under the same blue sky,
We are meeting as friends, no more.

The sea and the sky are mighty. They make my heart
afraid.
The trees and the sky have beauty and wild birds nest in
the shade.
But oh, the grass of the moorland,
And oh, the turf of the down,
The grass and the sky for my love, my love,
Till its green turns brown!

The sea is a lusty monarch. He rules his own with a will.
The trees are a luring shadow, gloom in the shade of the
hill.
But oh, the sweet young grass blades
And the dear blue sky above,
The tender green young grass blades
For my love, my love!

The sea is a terror in darkness, as the trees beneath the
moon,
Each to each in the darkness telleth a ghostly rune.
But oh, the song of the grasses
By day and by night the same!
By day and by night the grasses
Whisper her name, her name!

Have I not given you ever of my best,
O world? And is this all?
A friend's rememb'ring, e'er to the heaven-blest,
Would be too sweet to pall—
O world! Is this your all?

O careless world! Have you no love, no ruth?
I have outpoured my all.
My heart has agonized to keep its truth,
To vindicate its call,
O world! Can this be all?

For immolated self and joyless days
You gave—and this is all—
A brief acclaim, cheap glory, careless praise,
And now a shadowy pall,
Forgetfulness, on all.

Have I achieved the thing I strove to do?
Have I not served you all?
Have I to God and my own soul been true,
And can no mercy fall?
What use, if this be all!

You shall not hear me cry,—I make no moan.
World! I am not your thrall!
A grave, alone, unvisited, unknown?
Ah, that cannot appall,
Since I surrender all.

COME NOT SO NEAR

Come not so near, so near!
Too well you know how idle are the dreams.
  Ambitious words, clothed in scant modesty,
Come not to you with any grace, it seems,
  Can justify the sorry lack in me.

Not you who are so dear,
Dare I let in to view my naked soul.
  For you I cannot strip away my pride,
Nor to your eyes unfold the secret scroll.
  Stand farther off. I fear you. Turn aside.

Would you then see so clear
Where in the fight I faltered overmuch?
  Where a late thrust still ridged and livid lies?
Ah, no, my friend, I hide them from your touch,
  And from your gentle, wondering, wounding eyes.

In and out the roses going,
  Soft I stoop and touch the flowers,
Ever seeking, never knowing
  Whence they come, these quickening powers.

On the blown sand beaches straying,
  By a hundred tiny streams,
Breakers storming, ripples playing
  Only stir my soul to dreams.

Though we touch the shore of wonder,
  Find a miracle of flowers,
Some strait barrier keeps asunder
  Their dream life from this of ours.

Brief as midnight fairy dances,
  Frail as gossamer dew-pearled,
A creature of a thousand fancies
  Set in a dream-encircled world.

I would that I had kept them—those old letters.
It was so sad a thing to let them go.
I thought to lose with them the dragging fetters
That held me to the past—and you—but no!
These chains of mine cannot be sundered so.

Yours was a chain of scarcely opened flowers,
Sun-kissed, dew-fed, unused to wind or snow;
So fragile, in the summer rain it cowers.
Mine is a chain such as lost spirits know,
That link by link unites them to their woe.

You snapt the strands, as children in their playing
Break up the daisy chains they tire of so.
I cannot lose my bonds for all my praying.
Under your hands you find me garlands grow,
But faded are the only flowers I know.

IN THE VALLEY

Ladye, we travel the same long way,
Shall we face together the perils? Oh, say
Will't share with me the joys of the day?
  Wilt thou walk in the valley with me?

Long is the way, and strange and drear,
Will't ever falter with danger near?
The shades of the forest are dark with fear.
  Dare I walk in the valley with thee?

Doubt not my arm nor my weapon's might.
I am sworn to honour and do the right.
My shield is the shield of a gentle knight.
  Oh, walk in the valley with me!

Guide thou my step where the way is steep.
Comfort my heart when the shades are deep,
And take my hand and my troth to keep.
  I will walk in the valley with thee.

SONG

Hymn to the happy stars,
Hymn to the stars,
To the stars, the sky!
Oh, sing—sing—sing—
To the cloudlets flying in ecstasy,
Bird of the beating wing!

Publish my song afar,
Carry it far,
Oh, swiftly fly!
Sing—sing—sing—
Carry my silent song on high,
Bird of the silver wing!

I am dumb for I met her eyes.
I have seen her eyes,
Grey eyes of my love!
Oh, sing—sing—sing—
To the blissful height of the heaven above,
Bird of the soaring wing!

Lord of the night, hast Thou forsaken it?
I see not anything behind this heaven,
These floods of light and yellow-painted moon!
Why hast Thou done this—made the night so fair
And hidden Thyself beyond our groping hands,
Closing us in from Thee by too fair things?
Not with great sorrow hast Thou barred the door,
But with sweet pleasures, cloying as the breath
Of full-blown lilies and ripe falling fruit.
Thou givest to our gaze a peaceful sky,
A blue calm, all enveloping our days
And all unpierced, all barren lacking Thee.
Will Thou fling gifts and take away Thyself?
Then what avail our bitter joy in these?
Take all, take all, and come Thou down to earth!

Once, when I prized Love more than all,
I sought him glad of heart and brave,
Craved his soft looks and luring call,
And bowed my neck to be his slave.

He did not drop his heavenward eyes,
Nor turned his head my face to see,
He smiled divinely to the skies,
And scattered gifts, but not on me.

With patient feet and clamouring heart
I kept me closely by his side.—
My praying hands he tore apart,
My faint beseechings he denied.

He passed in glory from my sight,
He and his favoured among men.
He left me 'reft of joy and light—
But I will never pray again.

I learnt my lesson passing well,
And put Love wholly from my way.
And I redeemed my soul from hell,
And lived in calm until to-day.

Then Love grew sad that I forsook
My homage and my agony,
And turning, smiled with winsome look,—
He smiled and stole the strength from me.

And now he keeps me in his train—
A silent throng where hope is not.
He spares no bitterness, no pain,
Because I had forgot!

IF I WERE A CIRCUS-DANCER

If I were a circus-dancer
  And you were a painted clown,
I'd fling you a saucy answer,
  And laugh your reluctance down.
I'd call you my lover boldly,
  And the world might smile or frown,
If I were a circus-dancer
  And you were a painted clown.

If I were a Chelsea slavey
  And you were a serjeant gay,
I'd bring you my pies and gravy—
  You could put up the banns to-day!
Through the area rails we'd whisper,
  And "Missis" might say her say,
If I were a Chelsea slavey,
  And you were a serjeant gay.

But I am a proud man's daughter
  And you have no pedigree,
And Fate, though we both besought her,
  Would not smile on you and me.
The width of the world's between us,
  And the weight of the world's decree,
For I am a proud man's daughter
  And you have no pedigree.

A MARCH VIOLET

Under soft skies, mist-hung, the cold wet morn
  Broods desolate o'er cruel Winter's reign—
  Ruin and chaos, gloom, despair and pain—
Until this miracle of Spring is born.

Youth calls it Hope, but they who sorrow bear
  Knows 'tis Endurance makes its breath so sweet;
  While Age, with wisdom learned at Sorrow's feet,
Sees with clear eyes Love conquering Despair.

Each to his need interprets Nature's smile,
  Each to his heart the mystic message takes—
  Courage for strife and soothing for all pain.
Life shall be yours, though you must grieve awhile.
  Grieving, look upward! Wait, while morning breaks
  Through the slow dawn, for earth to smile again.

LOVE SONG

Oh, joy of a day newborn!
O day of an April blue!
The skylark sings to the morn,
And I to you.

Oh, maddening song of Spring!
O moon in a haze of blue!
Oh, flutter of happy wing!—
O Loved and True!

Oh, terror of darkening night,
And shadow over the blue.
The bird world longs for the light,
And I—want you.

FOR ME

I know, I know, though all the waves are still,
  And all the swift wind voices are hushed, and go
Silently by, a voice all secretly
Sings through the trees its silent song to me,
  Singing that I may hear it, and may know.

I know, I know, though every star be dim,
  And every lamp of earth faint and burn low,
One lamp, one star, one incense-laden shrine
Lights and grows fragrant,—glows for my sake—Ah,
    mine!
  I know, I know, I cannot choose but know.

THE SONG ETERNAL

(From the French of Madame Rostand)

When the years have gone and we both are old,
And golden tresses have changed to grey,
We will sun ourselves in the living gold,
We will sit recalling life to our trembling limbs and cold,—
The garden's warm in May!
Our hearts keep carnival with the Spring,
Young love in our midst is blossoming,—
You're my lover once again and you woo me as of old
With tender and shining eyes. We cling
To all that the years still hold.
Where our love 'neath the trellised vines we told
We will dream our dreams again till the evening light enfold,
Here, in the month of May,
When the years have gone and we both are old,
And the golden tresses have changed to grey.

The bench is green with the moss of years
Where we found love waiting so long ago.
We have done with hope, we have done with fears,
We have come to fuller joy, past the pity and the tears,—
We have reached the evening glow.
Over and over our vows were spoken—
Recall the giving of each old token,
The happenings of an hour, the trifles love endears.
Repeat them now, though the voice be broken,

And a kiss must stay the tears!
The sunset glow, as our last hour nears,
Falls softly on our heads,—illumes, caresses, cheers,—
Though the hair be white, and lo!
The bench is green with the moss of years
Where we found love waiting so long ago.

I lavish on you this love of mine,
And year by year I have more to give.
Ah, what will matter the furrowed line?
Each day brings fuller love—each hour is made divine—
Love shall serenely live.
Think of the memories of years of sowing,
A chain of links that is living, growing—
A chain of living links that holds your heart to mine—
Remembrances through our two lives flowing
Where love is the seal and sign.
And when we have all but drained Life's wine,
My faith shall still support, my arm shall still entwine,
Yea, while we two shall live!
For lo, I squander this love of mine
And year by year I have more to give.

When the years have gone and we both are old,
And golden tresses have changed to grey,
We will sun ourselves in the slanting gold,
We will sit recalling life to our shaking limbs and cold,—
The garden's warm in May!
Our hearts keep carnival with the Spring,
Young love in our midst is blossoming,
We are lovers once again, we are radiant as of old!
With tender tremulous lips you bring

The love that the years still hold.
Where the dreams of our splendid youth we told
We will sit and smile at time till the evening light enfold,
Here in the month of May,
When the years have gone and we both are old,
And golden tresses have changed to grey.

AT HER GRAVE

Over the border of Everyday,
  Into a world where no tears flow
There's a secret way
  I know,
Beyond the borders of Everyday.

A world of echoes and moaning trees,
  Where dying eyes lend the glowworm light,
Where still one sees
  At night
Half gleam, half shadow, the beckoning trees.

Into the land of the Far and Near
  Would you come with me if you knew the way?
Would you enter here
  To-day.
Where her soul inhabits the Far and Near?

What whisperings where the branches wave?
  No sound of leaves, but a farewell tone!
Ah, would you brave
  Alone
The shadow there where the abeles wave?

The sod her footprints shall hold and keep.
  The swaying grass is an echoed sigh.
She does not sleep
  Or die.
The grave may claim but it cannot keep.

Petals of rosebuds fallen apart,
They are the lips I still may kiss.
I hold her heart
In this
White rose with the petals fallen apart.

Across the border of Everyday
Into the world where dim ghosts dwell
I know the way
So well!
I have passed the borders of Everyday!

THE LAST VIGIL

Light the last candle. Day is quickly ended.
Night swiftly falls o'er this last hour of mine.
Have patience, will you not, a little longer?
And let our hands, as long ago, entwine
Now, in this hour of mine.

Are you so tired of watching with my weakness?
Am I not tired? What is my life to me?
I leave it without joy or passionate weeping,
Only a silent quitting, restfully,—
What has life given to me?

Around, the shadowing elms stand dim and patient.
Scented and dim, the garden lies at rest.
Soon shall I lie in yet more quiet keeping
Where no leaves rustle, no bird stirs in the nest,—
A garden all for rest.

Why do you weep? You will have peace hereafter.
Have you not prayed for such an hour as this?
You will have space for dreams and future laughter
And time for song and all the mirth you miss
In such an hour as this.

What late regret has touched your heart to pity?
And why so strangely shaken with sobs for me?
Your hand is cold and trembles in my enfolding.
What miracle has chanced that you should be
Shaken with grief for me?

Forgive? Ah, do you seek for my forgiveness!
Nay, do not weep. It was my fault, all mine.
Forget.—Ah, see, Dear Heart, I have forgotten.
I was no worthy mate—do not repine—
It was my fault, all mine!

How many leaves drop earthward in their dying.
No Summer sun shall wake their life again.
How many leaves are whispering full of promise.
To you, how many Springs of hope remain!—
Renew your life again!

Remember nevermore the seasons wasted,
But just the early sweetness of our love.
And seek, Beloved,—ah, but I desire it,—
Some happier bridal, worthily to prove
The sweets of budding love.

Put out the candle. Dawn brings, calm and glowing,
This last day, wholly love's as was our first,
Undreamed-of hour, well-bought by years of weeping.
Shall I not smile at shadows all dispersed!—
The last day as the first!

"NOR ALL THY TEARS WASH OUT A WORD OF IT"

In the firelight and the moonlight
  Old dreams will have their way;
Old songs are sung to the startled heart,
  And wandering shadows, grey
And gaunt, drift over the wakened soul
  Like the flames' uncertain play.

In the light of the moon and the fire,
  Before the chill of the night,
Her casement wide to the sky she lay
  And her face was still and white.
The red light fell on her curvèd lips
  And the moon on her brow was bright.

Between the fire and the moonlight
  She mused while her passion slept.
She thought of the day of her choosing
  When the blood in her quick heart leapt.
"If I had chosen otherwise!"
  She said, and saying, wept.

"How could I know its menace
  Or how should the fear be told?
The heart of the fire to my heart was warm.
  Far-off, austere and cold,
A deathlike moon rode high. I chose
  The way of the red and gold.

"I looked at the pleasant hearthstone,
I shrank from the lonely sky.
Was it so ill to think of earth—
The dear earth, warm and nigh?
But my dreams come back to taunt me,
And the quest that I deemed too high.

"How had I fared had I chosen
The path that was steep and white,
Nor given my wild days over
To a passionate young delight,
Nor paid the price of the joy I won
Where the heart of the fire was bright?

"There is not on the earth a power
Can take from my lips the stain.
In the moonlight and the firelight
I cannot choose again!
And ever and ever the cold moon shows
Her scorn of the futile pain.

"Christ! Had I followed that whiteness
And walked 'neath the wide clear heaven,
Who knows but its light had faded,
Who knows but in vain I had striven!—
Light of my fire, never fail me
For my life to thy life is given!"

She turned from the paling goddess,
She turned to the burning fire,
And drew the folded curtains close
As the flames shot higher and higher.
She sprang to the door.—"Oh, come!" she cried,
"Thou lord of my dear desire!"

NORWEGIAN WOMAN'S SONG

Are you far away,
  Dearest, O dearest?
Go you too far
  For my love to follow?

"To the great river
  And none can follow.
Across deep fjords
  Beyond the ocean."

Than flowing river,
  Dearest, O dearest,
Than blue deep ocean
  My love is deeper.

"To the snow mountain,
  (Oh! Who can follow?)
Precipice, glacier,
  Nothing affrights me."

Neither shall mountain,
  Dearest, O dearest,
Mountain nor snow field,
  Affright me nor hinder.

"Swifter than arrows,
  (Oh! Who could follow?)
More fleet than eagles
  My feet are flying."

Than fleet-winged eagles,
Dearest, O dearest,
Than flying arrows
My heart flies faster.

"Then at the nightfall,
(I speed for her kisses!)
Waits there a maiden,
Blue-eyed, to greet me."

Alas, for my sorrow!
Dearest, ah, dearest!
Here must I leave you,
No more can I follow.

AMONG THE HILLS

Where streams flow softly to the sea,
  Among the heights, among the hills,
Some find their home eternally
  (The little laughing rills)
  In some deep lake among the hills.

Where streams run swiftly steep by steep,
  Beyond the fall of ridge and slope,
The racing tides their sea tryst keep
  (The headlong tides of hope)
  In glad descent from ridge and slope.

Where streams flow silently and slow,
  Between morass and bog and mire,
Some pause and lose their limpid flow,
  (O voiceless lost desire!)
  Forever sunk in that deep mire.

The streams flow blindly day by day
  To sea or lake or bog or sand.
And who but One should know the way,
  (They feel and know His hand)
  Or choose for them the lake or sand?

All is not fair, all is not good.
  Shall earth to any stream deny
The comfort of her motherhood?
  (Turning from any cry)
  To one small stream its hope deny?

O Filler of the streams and rills,
O Maker of the mire and sea,
You know why some have left the hills,
(O wandering agony!)
And have not found their home the sea.

Will You not then lift up Your hand
And all the little streams call home?
Whether from rock or ridge or strand,
(Foul mud or whitened foam,)
Make plain the road that leads to home?

A WINDOW IN FEBRUARY

I

1

Here is my world—
A small pane of glass,
A square patch of sky.
Alternate day and night,
Changes of dusk and light,
Shine, darken, and so pass by.

2

Here, as I lie,
I know there's a world full of birds,
For often they pass
And I catch the brown flash of their wings.
And I know what fields are like
With daisies and children playing,
(Though I never have seen the grass)
For people come and talk to me and tell me of these
strange things.

3

Content? With only a window
To look through day after day?
More. I am almost happy.
You see, there is always the sky.
Enough of the blue
To show that God smiles up in heaven.
Enough clouds, tempest-driven,
For the sun to pierce through,
Red with dawn or a menace of grey.

4

One brown sodden bough
Of the hawthorn that grows
In the garden next door
Swings over the pane,
Sways across in the wind
And swings backward again.
And who can be poor
When counting the leaves,
The fresh leaves? And soon
They'll be budding and green!

5

And who can be poor
When, even now, after rain
Every twig is a-quiver,
Hung heavy with pearls?
They hang for a moment
Wet, shining, resplendent,
Then fall and are shattered and lost, but always,
Always they gather again.

6

Swift as light past my window
The mating birds fly,
Swift as light and as fair.
Song pierces the rain
As they sing out of sight,
Eager, blithe, unaware
That their twittered refrain
Comes straight to my heart and is cherished and echoed,
Cherished and loved as the light.

II

1

And yet more beautiful once a year,
In foaming wave over wave of bloom,
The buds of the thorn unfold in glory,
In fragrance, beauty, immortal youth.
And white in the veil of the twilight gloom.
White in rain or in sunset it tells its story,
The spring that returns and unfading truth.

2

This I have, all my own,
Of a wonderful pageant of years and of flowers,
Of a marvelous chain of God's garlanded flowers
That is white between earth and His throne.

3

Content—ay, more than content.
Life and death have I seen
And the ultimate infinite bloom
In the steps of miraculous Spring.
The birth of a bud on a thorn,
The birth of a seed from a flower,
The death of the flower that has borne.
Wonder of Wonders!
As immense, inspiring, strange,
As out in the spaces of keen white splendour
Star dust budding and blossoming forth
And bearing a blood-red sun;
Bearing out of the fruitful sheen
Legions of planets and trains of stars,

Garlanded planets and trains of stars,
White blossoms of night that the angels gather
For the crown of Mary, the Queen;
That the angels cover their eyes as they gather
To border the robes of Mary, the Queen.

4

Kind, so kind, is Mary the Holy.
Oft when the long night wearies me
And sleep is shattered by pain,
I pray to the Holy Mother, and she comes and sits by my side.
Then, and I bless her, she does not wear
Her robes of the star-world's glory;
She thinks that my eyes are maybe tired
And she wears no crown on her hair.
Softly, softly, she comes and sings.
I see her sweet face, holy and mild,
Glow in the gloom like a pure gem,
And she sings to me as she sang to a Child
Once when she was a Maiden-Mother
Long ago in Bethlehem.

III

1

Once I dreamt of hell.
I saw a vision of pain and death,
Of blank foul streets and an unknown horror,
Embodied horror and things of dread.
I saw the fallen and shamed of earth,
The unclean clothed in their evil deeds,

Souls made hideous by their deeds,
In grim procession go through the night.
They stumbled and reeled in the slimy street.
Sick with fear in the dark I listened,
But no words came from the monstrous rout,
Only a moaning. With eyes death-haunted,
With horrible eyes they stared at me
And peered at each other as though for pity or aid.
Wrapt in the gloomy web of a dream,
Immovable, helpless, with bursting brain,
I looked and waited and spoke no word;
Till one, indescribable, hideous, a shape
Unhuman, nameless, and still the soul of a man,
Dragged itself past me with a hopeless terrible cry,
Half shriek, half groan, and I shuddered away and fell
And hid my eyes from the empty and blackened heaven.

2

I was afraid to pray, afraid to call
On the Holy Name. Suppose that He should not hear!
I should go mad, I know,
Mad, mad, if I cried and He made no sign;
Mad if I turned in my terror and did not see Mary near.

3

I have been ill since then; many and many a night
So ill that I could not pray.
Does Mary grieve about them? Do you think she can
make it right?
I will say a thousand Aves. Perhaps she will find a way.

4

I think she does not want me
To fear or be troubled about the dead,
For I see the blesséd so often in dreams
And have looked but once into hell.
I think she showed me the horror and dread
That I might pray for the tortured ones
And pity the souls who fell.

IV

1

Content and more than content
In these days when I wait and listen
And have so much to learn.

Heaven and Hell have I seen;
Heaven and Hell and the shadow
Of dreams that are spun between.

I have looked on birth and death
And the fruitful miraculous bloom
In the steps of miraculous Spring.

And the seasons pass in turn
Till the ancient sorrowful year descends
Slowly the steps of the tomb.

But new years come and bring
The joy of the growing green,
June of the fragrant breath.

Never the cycle ends,
The pageant of life and death,
The changing of night to day.

And I am content to live
While birds are content to sing,
And then—one can but pray.

THE LEGEND OF THE SEA GULL

When day was robed in early grey
Three white ships sailed from out the bay
And launched upon an unknown sea;
Three goodly ships all silver fair,
Their silken sails outstretched to bear
The snow-white princess, Heart-of-May.

From every mast and every spar
Swung banners bright as dewdrops are,
And blooms of morning rose were flung
Along the decks, and soft between
The roses blooming, sheen on sheen,
Lay Heart-of-May the flowers among.

From out dim harbours floated free
Music of lutes, and minstrelsy
Sweet to the ear, and sweet and far
Young maidens' laughter, peal on peal,
Laughter as clear as ripples are
That break around the silver keel.

But for the princess in her pride,
No song could charm, no beauty please.
Her blue eyes marked the flowing tide,
Her gaze was on the distant seas,
And all her thoughts went out to meet
One who should kneel before her feet.

Three times the fair young moon rode high,
And three times in a purple sky

Was swallowed up in seas of night;
And never barge rose on her sight,
And never sail upon the swell
Of wide horizons caught the light.

And thrice the old moon waned and died
The while they drifted on the tide;
And thrice the princess wept for shame
That no swift barque to greet her came;
That no fair knight should haste to woo
The snow-white princess in her pride.

Swift on the fair smooth sea they sped;
The changing skies smiled overhead,
Till in her heart a new hope sprang.
In the faint east a barque appeared
Growing and gleaming as it neared
And on the deck was one who sang.—

"O sail, from what enchanted shore!
O day that I have waited for!
O hand that touched my hand in dreams!
Your coming of a surety seems
Too sweet a thing, too sweet to be!"
His lute dropped downward from his knee.

"Princess," he said, "child of a king,
Lo, to your feet my song I bring,
My love song chanted night and day.
Than this I give I crave no more;
I ask no less than all your store;
Give me your heart then, Heart-of-May!"

She turned her queenly golden head.
"Rate you my maiden worth so low?
I make no gift to prince or king.
The treasure of my heart will go
To who gives riches in its stead."
Then grave he looked at her and said:

"Seek you for riches you must show
Wealth of your own that I may know
You a true princess-wife will prove.
If you in hearts come trafficking
What worth is in the freights you bring?
What gifts to buy the gift of love?"

"Three white ships have I in my train,
Silver-white without a stain,
And priceless are the freights they bring.
The first is named Lure-of-the-Eyes,
The second, Gates-of-Paradise,
And in my ships all pleasure lies.

"The third ship Singing-Voices is,
And these are all my treasuries,
And these the worthy freights they hold.
They carry all that men desire,
The voice for song, the heart for fire,
The eyes to burn, the mouth to kiss."

The prince looked steadfast on her face,
Nor saw the three ships in their place,
Nor heeded he their merchandise.
And slow he answered, "In this mart
These have no worth to win my grace;
Hast thou no ship called Faithful Heart?"

She looked on him with cold blue eyes,
And looked beyond him to the skies.
She answered with a coaxing tongue,
"Oh, they are fair, my argosies!
And have you fit exchange in hand?
What gold and gems from your own land?"

"Wealth and to spare I bear in hand;
Here is red gold from mine own land,
And here the silver of my isles:—
A plain gold ring where you may see
Two true hearts joined eternally;
The silver crown—Humility.

"If you are worthy love, then take
And wear this crown for true love's sake;
Bend low, bend low your golden head."
The princess to the brow burned red,
Fierce anger to her blue eyes leapt,
And proudly from his side she stept.

"You with your yet unwon renown
Dare ask of me for a paltry crown,
For a ring ungemmed and plain to see,
More than my priceless argosy!
More than my fair ships laden deep
With dreams all golden and honeyed sleep!

"No true prince do you seem to be,
And no king's son who offers me
The circlet of Humility!
And as for love I have a page
Can prate of vows and lover's gage,
And smiles and bowers and tokens free."

Ah! When he saw her turn away,
Her bright eyes gleaming cold and grey,
Her hair flung backward from her brow,
(Her golden hair,—strands of delight)
His heart yearned to her at the sight,
And pale he stood there in the prow.

"Naught have I won, O fair princess,
Though much I claim and much posses.
Naught have I won this bitter day.
Much have I lost this bitter morn;
On all my gifts you fling your scorn;
Yet I must love you, Heart-of-May!"

At that her anger faded slow
As slanting sunbeams melt the snow.
"But is there one thing you will do,
One wish of mine you will fulfill?"
"Ah, Heart-of-May, you have my will;
Speak and my life is given for you!"

Oh, wasteful of her wiles was she.
With cunning was the prince beguiled;
To the blue waves she looked and smiled:—
"And will you then do aught for me?
Then for my sake give up your breath,
Then for my sake lie still in death!"

The swift seas rocked and hurried past.
The deep seas swelled; the slender mast
Dipped to the foam and shuddering rose,
And in the mingled rush and roar
The leaping waves reached in and fast
To their clear depths the young prince bore.

Oh, cold and dark the green waves leap
O'er closed white lids, fast closed in sleep;
And to and fro the cold waves fling
A crimson robe, a princely thing
Tossed for the wild seas' winnowing,
And shrieking all the fierce winds sweep.

Faint and far-off a sad voice sings;
Far-off but clear it upward rings
And sounds above the sounding tide.
Then springs she to the vessel's side
And hears, with staring eyes all wide,
The dreadful words of doom it brings:

"Sail for eternity," they say,
"Nor ever reach a friendly bay.
Sail and no man to pity you.
Look down and see me 'neath your keel
To follow you for well or ill.
Sail and no more be Heart-of-May."

Oh, far and deep the deep seas down
There swirled a crown, a silver crown—
The spurnèd crown, Humility—
And far and wide the wide seas o'er
Three white ships drift for evermore
Sailing from unknown shore to shore.

The tall cliffs towered dark and steep
Up to the dark sky blue and deep;
And wide the glistening waters spread,
And far the shining ships they led,
Oh, wide and far till overhead
Day shadowed to her purple sleep.

She paced the deck by night and day;
She sought their headlong course to stay,
And laboured still her barque to steer
By sun and stars; she felt the fear
Grow, surely as the mornings came
And evenings died in sullen flame.

Clear rose the sun and clearly set
On the princess pale and pacing yet.
It rose upon a robe of red
Far on the waste of waters spread;
It set upon a red robe tossed,
In woeful shades and terrors lost.

But worse than all the things of dread,
There followed where the vessel led,
From dusk to early chill of morn,
No night too dark, no storm too wild,
The white face floating cold and dead,
Forever on the swift seas borne.

Past the weed beds of ocean's floor;
'Mid tangled growths of gold and green;
The spiny shelves of coral o'er;
Among the red and purple flames
Of strange sea creatures without names,
Followed the white face evermore.

Then did the strong fear touch her heart.
Her hair streamed round her like a cloud,
Her head upon her breast was bowed.
She stumbled to the vessel's side,
And, "Take me if you must," she cried,
"For gone my strength and gone my pride."

Downward she slipped. The eager sea
Caressed and bore her to his side.
Ah, dread! She sees the prince fling wide
His arms—her welcome to that place!
His kiss fell on her rigid face;
She sank in death to his embrace.

* * * * *

A red star rose before the sky
Had lost its green. Before the day
Had darkened o'er the dreaming bay
Two snow-white birds with silver wings
Rose as the star of morning springs,
And soared above the flying spray.

Upon her head one wore a crown,
A silver circle fair to see;
Around her neck a plain gold ring;
And upward sweeping, wing by wing,
Into the dim skies smiling down
They soared, of Love's fair kingdom free.

King and Queen and pikemen all
  Sat at their meat and wine.
A strange priest came to the castle yard,
Lean with travel and stained and marred,
  His staff of Norway pine.

Outspoke the King all lustily,
  "Ye travel a toilsome way!
Come taste our wine and lord with us,
Come sit and sup and board with us,
  All on a Winter's day!"

Sir Guy, the priest bent to the King
  And sat him down at the board.
He lifted not the blood-red wine;
His fingers made the Holy Sign,
  But his white lips spoke no word.

He sat him down at the King's left hand,
  His face was dark and grim.
He tasted not the good wheat bread,
He broke it up on the board instead,
  And kissed the flagon's rim.

He broke the bread in the eyes of the Queen,
  Bowing his head to pray.
She shivered, blanched, and looked aside,
But he saw her frightened eyes grow wide
  Or ever she turned away.

He rose and strode from the table then,
(The fear in her eyes spoke true),
Beckoned her out from among them all,
And after him to the stone-flagged hall
She trailed in a splendour of blue.

He trod the stones with the air of a king,
Thrusting her hounds away.
She stepped like one of her fame bereft,
And brokenly, to the right and left
Her body began to sway.

"What shall I say to you, O Queen?
What, in the name of the Lord?"
She made no sign in her bitter dole;
His eyes smote to her naked soul
Like the piercing of a sword.

"There is but one name that is meet for you.
By the oath wherein ye are bound,
Recreant, recreant to your vows!
A curse on you and your husband's house—
On him for a pagan hound.

"A curse on you and your husband's kin
Beyond the gates of death!"
She shivered under his wrath and scorn,
She shook in his wrath like the beaten corn
Under the tempest's breath.

"A penance, Queen, for your soul's distress
To pluck you out of hell.

Put off your robes and your jewels fair,
And clip the gold of your shining hair.
Betrayed by your pride you fell.

"Leave your state and the fame you found
When you came to this godless door.
Pull off your sinful marriage ring
And follow me in place of the King
To the shrine beyond the moor."

Her tears nigh drowned her gleaming hair
As it rolled to her silken knees.
She clipped the bright locks one by one
For the sake of the evil she had done
And the wrath that she might appease.

Her tears fell down on the granite floor,
And the gold rings from her hands.
She loosed her pearls, threw off her crown,
Her sapphire robes dropt shimmering down
Out of their silver bands.

Sir Guy stood still by the white Queen's side
Muttering low his prayer.
He flung her a hood and a woolen gown,
And she hid her beauty in sullen brown,
In garb that a slave should wear.

Then turned the priest to the castle door,—
"Now more than this must you dare."
The King strode suddenly to the hall
With hounds and pikemen and archers tall
On the heels of the flying pair.

The eyes of the King were red and wild
  Beneath his brows' black frown.
He saw the wide-flung oaken door,
He saw the golden jewel-strewn floor
  And the trampled blue of a gown.

"I fear you no whit," said Sir Guy the priest.
  Straight by the door he stood.
"I fear you no whit," and he made the sign,
And cursed the King by the Bread and Wine
  And the chalice of Holy Blood.

Then muttered the King a single word
  And his savage will was done.
A dozen axes hewed him down;
He clutched as he fell at the skirts of brown
  A-thirst for the soul half-won.

He gasped as he fell the Holy Name,
  Unshaken, in grim command.
And cried, "For the rest of Paradise!"
But the Queen turned from him and hid her eyes
  And shrank from her husband's hand.

"Dogs to dust," said the pagan King,
  "Carrion to the crows.
The world shall see how a king can deal
With all who come to plunder or steal
  His wild white moorland rose.

"Put on your stateliest bordered robe,
  Your queenly hands begem."

"Nay, what is this stain so dark to see
Defiling the silver broiderie,
A-drip to the silken hem!"

"Come, crown you, crown you and make you fine,
And deck you and make you fair."
She dropped the crown from her fingers wan,
But over her fingers the red stain ran
And pooled on her fallen hair.

"No place have I within these walls,
No place in earth or heaven.
And I am no more your Queen, O King,
For the memory of this dread thing,
But outcast and out-driven.

"For my great sin's sake and the deed that was done!"
She wailed and knelt on the stone.
She clipped three locks from the dark priest's head,
"With these I must journey far," she said,
"And redeem my soul alone.

"Here can I bide no more, no more,
Beneath the accusing sun.
I must travel far and go apace
To lay his hair in some holy place
Or ever my peace be won."

Beneath the gates and through the court,
While gloomily stared the King,
She went, and over the frozen heath,
Chilled and blown by the salt wind's breath,
A timorous broken thing.

The dim red sun went swiftly down
  As she sped on her holy quest.
It shone on a score of golden spears,
King and axemen and halberdiers,
  Following into the west.

The King and his men, on the tufted moor
  Stopped ere a league was done.
They saw her moving across the heath
Slow and silent and white as death
  In the red of the setting sun.

The hills lay dark beneath the stars
  As they bore her back in their train.
Logs and torches the King brought in
And bade them spread the soft wolfskin
  For her weary body's pain.

But she lay and moaned, nor looked at him
  Who gazed on her distressed;
She lay inert as the falcon lies
Wounded, her soul in her grieving eyes
  For the sake of her thwarted quest.

And famine came to the land, and hordes
  From the Northlands ravaged and slew.
And ever the wild King's heart was torn
With hate of the unknown faith, and scorn,
  And fear if perchance 'twere true.

"Your God," he said, "is a vengeful God!
  Deny Him and dare your fate."

But ever she cried, "O king, my lord,
Let me bide by the dead priest's word.
What if 'twere now too late!"

Death was abroad in the land. The folk
Turned sullenly: "Let her go!
Let her go who has wrought the harm
To do her penance and work her charm."
And ever he thundered, "No!"

Blindness fell on the wrathful King;
His faithful dogs lay dead;
His soldiers wandered afar to slay
And hold Death off for a fierce brief day.
Then rose the Queen from her bed.

She went where the King cursed earth and heaven
And mocked at his empty throne.
She clasped his hands, clung to his side;
"Stay me no more!" "By Thor," he cried,
"You shall go, and not alone!"

She led him out with a gentle hand
To share in her pilgrimage;
A fierce blind King, dark brows drawn down,
A thin pale Queen in garb of brown
Soothing his pain and rage.

Grey and wild was the way of the heath
As they passed to its farthest bound.
She went with patient uplifted head
In the bitter way they had to tread
Ere they came to holy ground.

Down from the barren ridge of the moor
To the lowlands, forspent, they came.
To valleys rich in their growing grass,
To sound of bells and of chanted mass.
And scent of the incense flame;

Chapel, altar and holy well,
Crosses of carven stone.
"Here," said the Queen, "we stay our feet:
Here I wait for my penance meet
That I must do alone."

She drew from her breast the guarded hair
And knelt to the chapel priest.
"Sir priest, with the blood of a slaughtered saint
My hands are stained; my heart is faint,
And my soul would find release."

The good priest brought her to Anselm's shrine.
"Great," he said, "is his fame.
If change shall hap to the locks this night
Your soul is pure, your penance light
By the merit of Anselm's name.

"But if the hair is the same unchanged,
Woe to you, child of sin!
Pilgrimage dire and sore must you make,
Fasting oft for your sad soul's sake
Ere Heaven shall let you in."

He laid the relics before the shrine
Lifting his hands to pray.

The Queen kept vigil, with tapers alight;
They were three black locks at the fall of night,
  They were three white roses by day.

The first white rose was a sin confessed,
  The second a penance done;
The third rose was a sin forgiven
A soul accepted, absolved of Heaven
  And crowned with the peace she won.

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